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ABSTRACT

The title of this paper is perhaps amusing and provocative, but the emphasis is upon a serious matter. The paper is divided into three main sections. The first defines the educational process used in the Vocational Counseling Institute. It also discusses the problems of how personal growth and professional growth might be defined, and with the obvious implication of how difficult measurement is for these two concepts. The second part of the paper is more anecdotal, and describes some subjective impressions to, with, and about the trainees. It ends by quoting at length from a paper read at an American Personnel and Guidance Association convention, and asks a "burning" question. The primary implication was that the interviewers and counselors who participated in University training may actually be way ahead of their supervisors and managers, and even administrators, in the process of becoming autonomous, fully-functioning persons. (Author)

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Personal Growth and Professional Growth:
Do the Chicken and the Egg Both Come First?

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Personal Growth and Professional Growth: Do the Chicken
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The title of this paper is a somewhat amusing, perhaps, provocative one. But the subject matter is serious. The paper is divided into three main sections. The first defines the educational process used in the Vocational Counseling Institute. It also discusses the problems of how personal growth and professional growth might be defined, and with the obvious implication of how difficult measurement is for these two concepts. The second part of the paper is more anecdotal, and describes some subjective impressions to, with, and about our trainees. It ends by quoting at length from a paper read two years ago at this Convention, and asks a "burning" question.

The name usually given to the type of training conducted by the Vocational Counseling Institute is "laboratory education." By this term is meant a program which integrates the T-group method of sensitivity training - which we euphemistically called "Group Dynamics" - with other techniques such as lectures, and group problem solving exercises. Two elements used to distinguish laboratory education from other training methods are the learning goals involved and the processes used to focus on goals at two different levels (Buchanan, 1965; Schein & Bennis, 1965). Flowing from certain scientific and democratic values are several metgoals, or goals which exist on a very general level. Schein and Bennis mentioned five, which they asserted to be the ultimate aims of all laboratory education a) a spirit of inquiry or a willingness to hypothesize and experiment with one's role in the world; b) an "expanded interpersonal consciousness" or an increased awareness of more things about more people; c) an increased authenticity in in-

in interpersonal relations or simply feeling freer to be oneself and not feel compelled to play a role; d) an ability to act in a collaborative and interdependent manner with peers, superiors, and subordinates rather than in authoritative or hierarchical terms; and e) an ability to resolve conflict situations through problem solving rather than through horse trading, coercion, or power manipulation.

Other authors have articulated other goals or metagoals. The general consensus seems to be that laboratory education should have one or more of the following (cf. Argyris, 1964; Bradford, et.al., 1964; etc.):

1. Increased self-insight or self-awareness concerning one's own behavior and its meaning in a social context. This refers to the common aim of learning how others see and interpret one's behavior and gaining insight into why one acts in certain ways in different situations.

2. Increased sensitivity to the behavior of others. This goal is closely linked with the first one. It refers first, to the development of an increased awareness of the full range of communicative stimuli emitted by other persons (voice inflections, facial expressions, bodily positions, and other contextual factors, in addition to the actual choice of words) and second, to the development of the ability to infer accurately the emotional or noncognitive bases for interpersonal communications. This goal is very similar to the concept of empathy as it is used by clinical and counseling psychologists, that is, the ability to infer correctly what another person is feeling.

3. Increased awareness and understanding of the types of processes that facilitate or inhibit group functioning and the interactions

between different groups - specifically, why do some members participate actively while others retire to the background? Why do subgroups form and wage war against each other? How and why are pecking orders established? Why do different groups, who may actually share the same goals, sometimes create seeming insoluble conflict situations?

4. Heightened diagnostic skill in social, interpersonal and intergroup situations. Achievement of the first three objectives should provide an individual with a set of explanatory concepts to be used in diagnosing conflict situations, reasons for poor communication, and the like.

5. Increased action skill. Although very similar to #4, it refers to a person's ability to intervene successfully in inter- or intragroup situations so as to increase member satisfactions, effectiveness, or output. The goal of increased action skill is toward intervention at the interpersonal rather than simply the technological level.

6. Learning how to learn. This does not refer to an individual's cognitive approach to the world, but rather to his ability to analyze continually his own interpersonal behavior for the purpose of helping himself and others achieve more effective and satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Differential emphasis among the above objectives constitutes one of the most important dimensions for distinguishing among variations in laboratory education. Some groups tend to emphasize the individual's goals of fostering self-awareness and sensitivity. Others orient toward the more organizational objectives of understanding interaction phenomena and intergroup processes with the ultimate aim of improving organizational effectiveness. The Vocational Counseling In-

stitute had both of these goals in mind in structuring its program.

The Vocational Counseling Institute has had several kinds of Group Dynamics trainings. One has been a continuously meeting group of five or six persons who have stayed together as a group for one year periods. They meet daily for an hour and a half when they are in residence at the University (six one week periods during the academic year) and weekly for one and one half more hours during the rest of the time. Other Group Dynamics training occurs with groups of thirty (usually broken into two or three subgroups) while on campus at the University, and run by a variety of trainers, facilitators, or leaders. Typically, few activities or topics for discussion are planned. A leader is present, but he does not always accept, in fact, he often rejects any leadership roles. The participants discuss themselves and the way they portray themselves in groups. In the language of current psychological jargon, the focus is on the "here and now," that is, on behavior emitted in the group rather than behavior involving past experiences or future problems.

The leadership vacuum is often filled by feelings of frustration, expressions of hostility, and eventual attempts by some members to impose an organized structure on the group. These initial attempts to assume a leadership role are usually resented by other members, and either spontaneously, or because of the trainer's intervention, they begin to consider why the self-appointed leader has tried to force his will on the group. When events in our groups have followed their best course, the behavior of the other group members also becomes a basis for discussion such that every participant has an opportunity to learn how his own within-group behavior is perceived.

Given the unstructured group as the vehicle, and the behavior emitted in the group as the principal topic, of conversation, the success of our venture depended on the crucial process of feedback. Thus, the participants had to be able to inform each other how their behavior was being seen and interpreted, and to describe the kinds of feelings generated. This was the primary process by which the participants learned. They had to receive articulate and meaningful feedback about their own behavior, including their own feedback attempts (i.e., feedback on feedback) and their efforts to interpret group processes.

However, for the feedback process to have contributed to the goals of training, it was also necessary to have a climate of "psychological safety." That is, no matter what an individual does in a group or what he reveals about himself, the group must act in a supportive and nonevaluative way. Each individual must feel that it is safe to expose his feelings, drop his defenses, and try out new ways of interacting. Such an atmosphere has its obvious counterpart in any constructive or therapeutic relationship. To the extent that our various Group Dynamic Sessions have been successful or not, this atmosphere of safety has been the crucial ingredient. If there is to be successful personal or professional growth, there must be a transfer of training between the cultural island created by the University and the "back home" situations.

But there are problems facing us in trying to decide what has really happened and what has really been learned. Schein and Bennis (1965) mention the lack of an explicit theory of learning for use in specifying the relation between learning experiences and learning out-

comes. Nine individuals presented their formulations of the change process in Bradford et.al. (1964), and all were very different. Schein & Bennis attributed this diversity of theory to the wide range of outcomes seen as possible. Outcomes may include increased awareness, increased knowledge, changes in values, changes in attitudes, changes in motivation, or changes in actual behavior. Organizing all these into a single coherent system specifying relationships between training elements and learning outcomes is difficult indeed - probably more difficult for laboratory education than for other training methods.

A second problem is the ever present question of transfer of learning from the training group to the individual's life outside the group. More specifically, what is learned in laboratory education that is transferrable to the organizational setting? The problem is heightened because in the University-laboratory- education setting the following conditions were met: 1) the group met for a relatively long time in an isolated environment; 2) the group was somewhat heterogeneous, and will probably not meet together again, and 3) the continual reinforcement by the University staff that the learning culture was supportive, nonevaluative, nonthreatening, and, by implication, "different" from the world back home.

These conditions heighten the difference between the laboratory education group and the strictly work group, and would seem to work against transfer to the work situation. Groups conducted closer to the work situation, involving people from the same subunit, and incorporating particular organizational problems for discussion may enhance the probability of transfer, but they may lessen the probability of achiev-

ing the goal of personal growth. Many of the supporting elements seen as facilitating open expression of feeling, accurate feedback, and psychological safety have been removed.

Given the conditions existing during the first year of the training program, viz., training counselors for a large, bureaucratized organization which would tolerate little change in itself, i.e. what McGregor (1960) called a Theory X organization, there seemed little choice but to emphasize the personal growth aspects of our laboratory education experience for our participants. This was, I believe, a hidden decision, and one which was very slow in coming about. There was a great deal of cognitive input, as well as experiential input, during the first training year, on theories of organizations, and organizational change. While trainees were exposed to a great deal of academic information which could potentially have been of great importance to them, there was little they could do to put this knowledge into actual practice. However, there was also a good deal of input into a description, and practice of, the helping relationship. Trainees learned that there were ways in which one could be helpful not only to clients or applicants, but to almost everyone else, also. The skill of being able to listen in an understanding, non-evaluative way was not an easy one to acquire, but many people came gradually to understand just what stance was helpful in communication, and what stances were not. They were able to more easily put these skills into practice with their families and friends. Dealing with Employment Service applicants was a more complicated affair because of the pressure to produce a correctly

filled out application form, and some of our participants still have not learned how to conduct helpful interview and still have the "Form 476" filled out to the supervisor's satisfaction as their sole goal. The problem for the trainees is not only in having to complete careful statistical reports, but in returning to supervisors who have no training or understanding of what a helping relationship is all about. At least their families and friends do not need to judge them for the quality of filling out forms. Nor do they limit their contacts to a short period of time (cf. the 20 minutes or so that an ES interviewer spends with an applicant) or over a short period of time (cf. the one session, only, which most ES interviewers have with their applicants).

The result was that the participants were able to perform much better or at least more easily, in their social and familial relationships than in their on-the-job relationships. In turn, they found that as they were better able to understand others, that they began to change, themselves. Every participant in the program reports changes in himself or herself, and almost all report personal changes.

More basic than the concern about the improbabilities of changing an authoritarian system, however, was the decision on the part of the University staff that no professional growth could take place before there was personal growth on any account. When a group decided that it had issues among themselves "here and now" and did not want to play a tape of an applicant interview, for example, there was little or no argument on the part of the University staff "leader." Groups were there to deal with current issues. The trainees, themselves, began to recognize that they could not hope to help others, let alone to change others, until such time as they had helped themselves, and learned how

to change themselves. Many protested to the staff that they needed more time to be with each other and deal with intergroup problems, and interpersonal issues. What can we call this kind of response? Is it personal growth? I.e., do we posit this heightened awareness of self and others as symptoms of personal growth? If so then what do we call the increased awareness of the needs of applicant? Is it professional growth? I.e., do we posit that the awareness that one must care for the needs of self and others in a group as necessary before work can occur, and as a model for Employment Service groups, as professional growth? Then what do we call the increased awareness of the family group, and the neighborhood group? We began to ask ourselves whether it really made any sense to make a distinction between personal growth and professional growth. Rather, it seemed that the two were so complexly intertwined, or rather so synonymously defined, that we would be counting angels on the head of a pin more easily than making such a distinction as to define personal growth and professional growth differentially!

Naturally enough, the process of growth for our sponsoring Theory X Organization was a difficult pill to swallow, no matter whether they might think of personal or professional growth. The whole basis of the organization's maintenance is dependent on the Status Quo. "Observers," who were office managers, or their delegated subordinates, were ordered into the small groups by the then chief administrator of the city-wide agency. The organization could not tolerate the changes that were occurring among some of its lowest (on the status hierarchy) ranks. Suspicion was rampant. The trainees, still in the budding stages of their

growth, were intolerant of these "observers," insisting that these "observers" at least had to become participants as well, but that it would be much better if they just weren't there - or were not there until later in the course of the program. My interpretation of what they meant by the latter was that they needed more time to find themselves, and that after they had a better feel for where they were going they could better tolerate "outsiders," and might better be able to deal with them, and even to change their relationships with these supervisors and managers. Indeed, this became a pattern among some of the groups. Later in the training, groups did invite managers and supervisors in, and began to understand some of the difficulties they had, and began to understand them as persons. Several relationships changed significantly as a result of these new interactions.

Constraints were placed upon the University in an effort for the Organization to assert its authority, and to try to control the training at the University. Some of these controls seemed to stem from legitimate causes, e.g., it seemed perfectly legitimate to the University for the Employment Service to insist that small group meetings during off-campus times be held on specified afternoons of the week. After all, there is a much greater amount of applicant traffic during morning hours, and during the first three days of the week. But why would it be necessary to try to specify where such meetings should take place? What conceivable difference could it make to the Employment Service whether the group met in an Employment Service office, or at a campus location. Should it even matter if the group met in a participant's home? The point is that each group knows best where its

learning can best take place, but that Theory X Organizations feel the need to control for themselves, and will not allow or trust others to make decisions for themselves. One consequence for the organization was that some trainees began to see some of the "smallness" of the organization's thinking. As well as feeling frustrated, or perhaps instead of feeling frustrated by the constraints of the organization, they began to feel concern about what to do. In some cases, which I consider an unfortunate outcome, participants felt scorn for their employer. It can legitimately be argued that the latter is contraindicative of professional growth, but can we deny that those who would feel scorn rather than "beat their heads against that stone wall" did not grow personally?

All this seems to lead me to the conclusion that I have already stated, that the distinction between personal growth, and professional growth is probably an artificial one, for it seems that a wise personal decision has effects on the person in his home life and in his work life. The fact of the matter, however, is that there was a great deal of growth, regardless of the particular adjective added to that term.

But, to quote at some length from a paper Ariadne P. Beck and I presented to this convention in 1970.

"There is a discrepancy between the attitudes and commitments of line personnel (such as counselors, interviewers and aides) and the attitudes and commitments of supervisory, management and lower level administrative personnel. This has a variety of causes, one of which is the fact that for a number of years, orientation training to poverty problems has been focused on the line personnel primarily, creating an untenable problem in leadership for supervisors and managers by ask-

ing them to lead people who have new ideas (not always completely assimilated, i.e., those who are in the process of growth. Therefore, there is a pressing need for help to managers, supervisors, and lower level administrators... The discrepancy is further deepened by the fact that line personnel are more oriented to, and committed to the concept of service to the applicant, and to any organizational changes that improve this, while supervisors, managers, and administrators are more oriented to employers, the power structure of the community, the maintenance of the structure and procedures already established in the Employment Service and the political pressures that impinge upon the Employment Service as a public agency. This creates some complex communication problems within the larger Employment Service structure which underlie those existing within the local office itself. As a result, it is very difficult to bring about necessary procedural changes in a way that seems appropriate to everyone involved.

"To some extent these problems are reflected at all job levels in their relationship to those levels above them in the structure. The conflict, however, seems to be at its peak between counselors (and interviewers,) and their supervisors because counselors, (and interviewers,) are among the newest personnel in the system and are often given University training early in their ES career. Both the goals and significance of ES counseling have been in a process of continual evolution in recent years, and new trainees have been more clearly oriented to the latest redefinitions through their University training than were their supervisors through in-service training or orientation. Through the participation of state, regional, and DC ES staff in planning train-

ing programs, the University staff is kept abreast of these redefinitions and tends to incorporate them into its training... The supervisor may not be facilitating the implementation of new skills and at times may actually resist this."

The obvious implication is that our interviewers and counselors who participated in University training may actually be way ahead of their supervisors and managers, and even administrators, in the process of becoming autonomous, fully-functioning persons. That this might constitute a serious threat to the comfort of the higher level personnel is self evident. The burning question on my mind, however, is why the Employment Service shows little interest in training or motivating its supervisors, managers, and administrators, as well as its interviewers and counselors?

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